

Findings from the Local Authority Insight Survey

Wave 28: Universal Credit

July 2015

A report of research carried out by Ipsos MORI on behalf of the Department for Work and Pensions.

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1 Survey background and methodology

This summary has been prepared by Ipsos MORI, an independent research organisation operating under contract to DWP; it presents findings from wave 28 of the Local Authority (LA) Insight survey, which focuses on preparations for Universal Credit.

1.1 Background to the policy

Universal Credit (UC) is a new single payment for people who are looking for work or on a low income. It aims to help claimants and their families to become more independent and simplify the benefits system by bringing together a range of working-age benefits into a single payment.

1.2 Background to the survey

Questionnaire areas included:

- Preparing staff, systems and claimants
- Identifying vulnerable claimants
- Working in partnership
- Successes and challenges in preparation for UC

The full questionnaire can be found in the Appendix 1 of this summary.

Fieldwork was conducted between 17th November and 12th December 2014.

1.3 Methodology

Ipsos MORI conducted an online survey of benefit managers or those in a similar position at 380 Local Authorities (LAs) in England, Scotland and Wales who administered Housing Benefit. Email invitations containing unique links to the survey were sent to each organisation¹.

In total, Ipsos MORI received 145 responses to the survey. Of the 379 individual contacts, 7 respondents could not be contacted. Many LAs reported operating some form of shared services for benefits management – 21 authorities included in the survey were managed by 8 named individuals.

Adjusting for this, the survey received a response rate of 40%. As can be seen in Appendix 2, there was a good spread of respondents by type of authority and region. Nevertheless, the response rate varies somewhat between regions. This may affect the generalisability of the findings.

1.4 Summary of the findings

- The vast majority of LAs have taken action (91%) or are planning to take action (95%) to prepare for UC.
- Many LAs hold data on use of housing benefit online (41%), but not about access to digital services more generally.
- Most frequently LAs prepare claimants by directing them to DWP or Money Advice Service (MAS) websites. They are however working to improve information provision on their own websites.
- LAs are generally working to prepare both social (83%) and private (68%) landlords.
- Both internal (74%) and external (77%) partnerships are fairly common, and these generally are said to work well. Jobcentre Plus

¹ With the exception of one LA which requested not to be re-contacted for future waves of the Local Authority Insight Survey during wave 26.

(JCP) and Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB) are most commonly partnered with externally.

- Co-location is less prevalent, but JCP (20% are already co-located) and CAB (19% are already co-located) are still most common. Setting up co-location can be expensive initially, especially if extra office space is required. Exact costs were unknown or hard to quantify.
- Lack of consistent or clear information from DWP can be a source of frustration, and often prevents LAs from being able to prepare or be confident in their preparations.

2 Key Findings

2.1 Preparing staff, systems and claimants

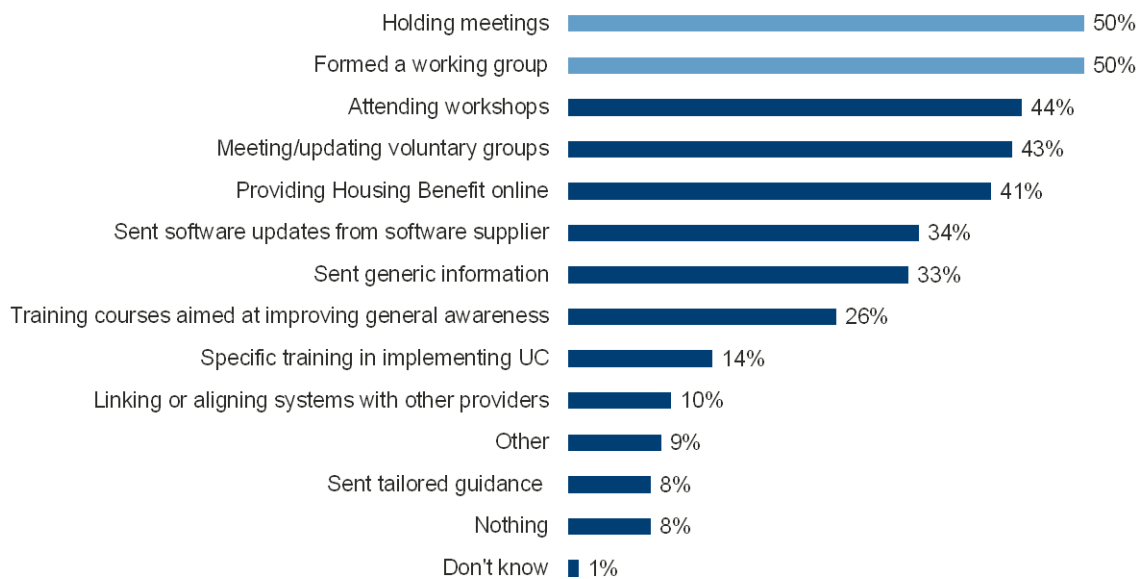
2.1.1 Preparing staff and systems

Ten per cent of LAs who responded to the survey have already implemented UC, and 90% had not (at the time of fieldwork).

Over seven in ten LAs (74%) said they were preparing staff and systems for the switch to UC. This splits into two thirds (66%) who were preparing but not yet ready and nearly one in ten (8%) who were completely prepared. A quarter (25%) said they were not yet making any preparations and one per cent didn't know what their current level of preparedness was.

Nine in ten (91%) said they had already taken action to prepare staff and systems. A further nine in ten (95%) were planning to take action to prepare staff and systems for UC. Most commonly, LAs were planning training courses aimed at improving general awareness (63%) and specific training in implementing UC (58%).

Q3a What has your LA done already to prepare staff and systems for UC?



Base: All local authorities (146)

Source: Ipsos MORI

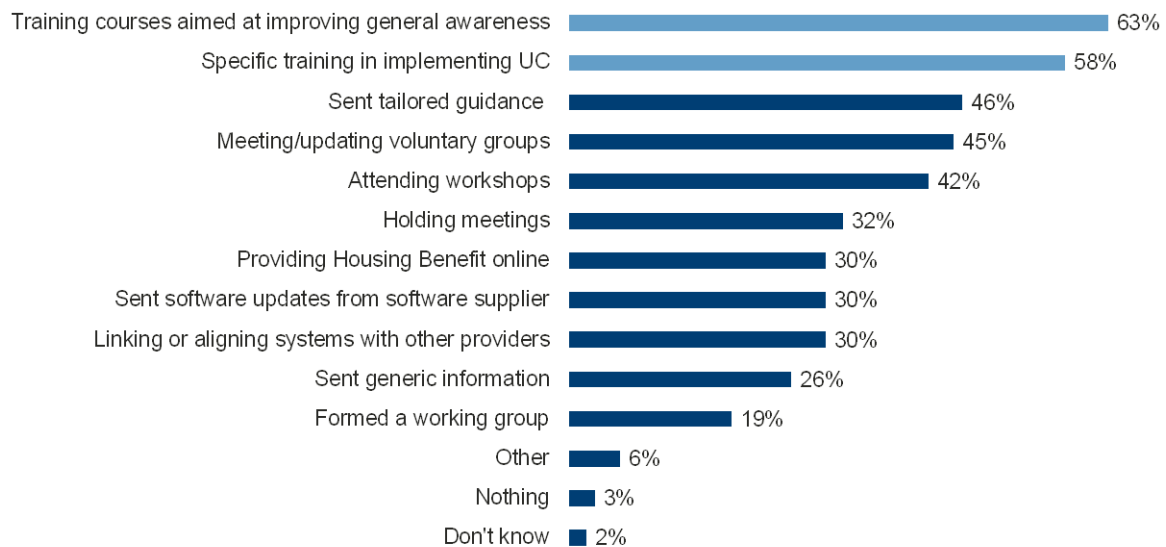
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For LAs that had already implemented UC, the most common activities were attending workshops, running training courses to improve awareness, and being sent software updates. LAs yet to implement UC most commonly had formed working groups (48%), held meetings (48%) and provided Housing Benefit online (42%).

Q3b What is your LA planning to do to prepare staff and systems for UC?

DWP



Base: All local authorities (146)

Source: Ipsos MORI

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Additional activities LAs were undertaking to prepare for UC included:

- Regular staff briefings and sharing of information;
- Partnership with local welfare groups to tackle digital exclusion and promote financial inclusion;
- Provided iPads for visiting officers to be able to access on-line in homes to claim UC & access advice;
- Maintained a flexible workforce by not recruiting into permanent roles but use of temps and fixed term contracts;
- Preparing office resilience for when HB staff leave;
- Encouraging social landlords to move away from rent free weeks; and
- Looking at services provided across the county to identify any gaps.

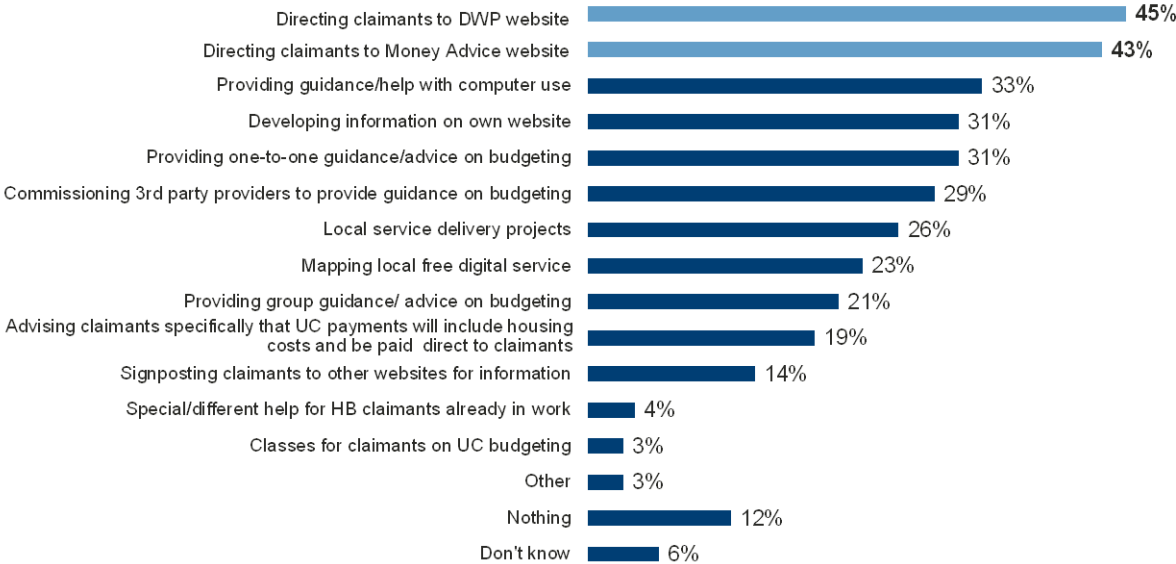
When it comes to collecting data around digital inclusion LAs activities were fairly limited. Four in ten (41%) LAs said they record the number of claimants who use Housing Benefit online. Around one in ten LAs (7%)

were collecting data on access to digital services at home, and a further one in twenty (5%) LAs were recording use of digital services without support.

2.1.2 Preparing claimants

Eight in ten (78%) LAs had already taken some form of action to prepare claimants for the switch to UC. Most commonly, LAs direct claimants to the DWP website (45%) and the MAS website (43%). Additionally, 14 out of 15 LAs that had already implemented UC had provided guidance to claimants on computer use.

Q5a What, if anything, has your LA done already to prepare claimants for UC? DWP



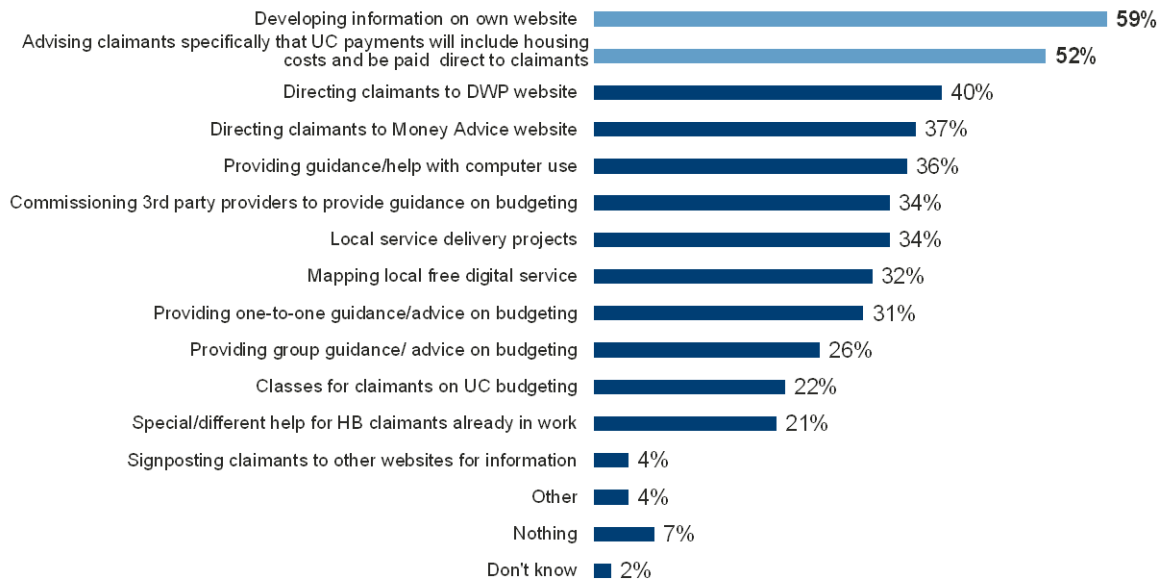
Base: All local authorities (145)

Source: Ipsos MORI

A further nine in ten (88%) were planning to take action to prepare claimants. Most commonly LAs were planning on developing information on their own website (59%) or advising claimants specifically that UC payments will include housing costs and be paid direct to claimants (52%).

Q5b What, if anything, has your LA planning to do to prepare claimants for UC?

DWP



Base: All local authorities (146)

Source: Ipsos MORI

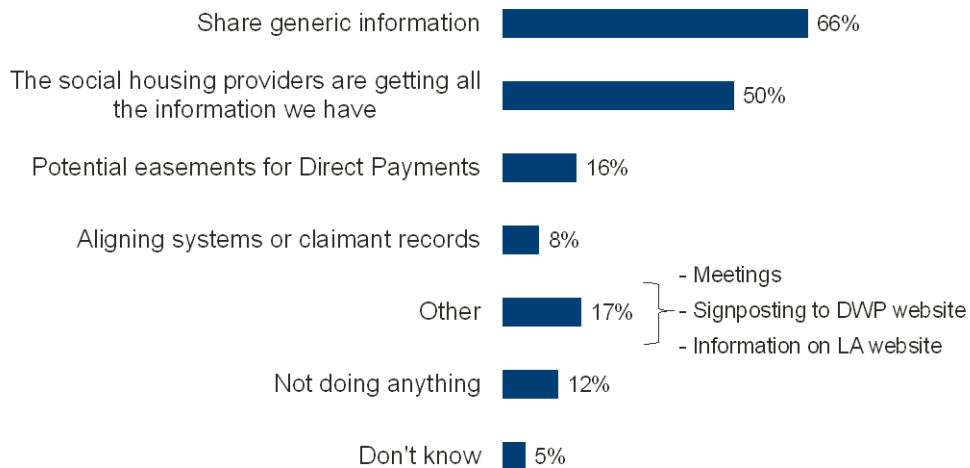
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2.1.3 Preparing landlords

Over eight in ten LAs (83%) were taking some form of action to prepare social landlords for the switch to UC. Most commonly, this was sharing generic information (66%). Half (50%) of LAs said social housing providers were getting all the information they had.

Q10 What, if anything, has your LA done/is your LA doing to prepare social landlords for the switch to UC?



Base: All local authorities (145)

Source: Ipsos MORI

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Nearly seven in ten LAs (68%) were taking some form of action to prepare private landlords for the switch to UC. Most commonly, they had set up landlord forums (63%) or included articles in newsletters etc. (45%).

Q11 What, if anything, has your LA done/is your LA doing to prepare private landlords for the switch to UC?



Base: All local authorities (145)

Source: Ipsos MORI

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One in ten LAs (10%) were already working with social landlords who had moved tenants to direct payments of HB and a further three in ten (30%) were planning to do so. These LAs were already doing, or planning to do the following activities:

- Meetings and ongoing discussions with Registered Social Landlords (RSLs)
- Set up working groups
- Direct payment pilot schemes
- Providing information to RSLs

Four in ten LAs (41%), however, had not worked with social landlords in this way and had no plans to do so. It seems lack of clarity from DWP is preventing LAs from making plans to work with social landlords as these LAs said they were waiting for further information from DWP before progressing.

2.2 Identifying vulnerable claimants

When it comes to identifying vulnerable claimants who might have difficulty engaging with UC, LAs fall into three groups:

2.2.1 Those who had the relevant information anyway

Some say they know who is vulnerable anyway due to existing HB processes or inference from the type of benefit required.

“We have previously established good links with RSLs to identify such cases. We are aware of a number by nature of the accommodation occupied.”

“We continue to identify vulnerable claimants as part of our on-going HB work.”

2.2.2 Those who had set up new processes as part of preparations for UC

New processes include identification via triage and initial engagement; working with social services, voluntary organisations and Jobcentre Plus to align records; and creation of dedicated working groups.

“Social Work & NHS engagement in projects plans to identify vulnerable clients via triage and business as usual processes.”

“We are currently developing a map of our residents who we expect to be most vulnerable to this change, with a view to aligning our services to provide appropriate responses.”

2.2.3 Those not taking steps to identify vulnerable claimants

Some LAs cite uncertainty around UC as being a barrier to making developments in identifying vulnerable claimants. This may be linked in part to confusion over who holds responsibility for this – LAs themselves or DWP.

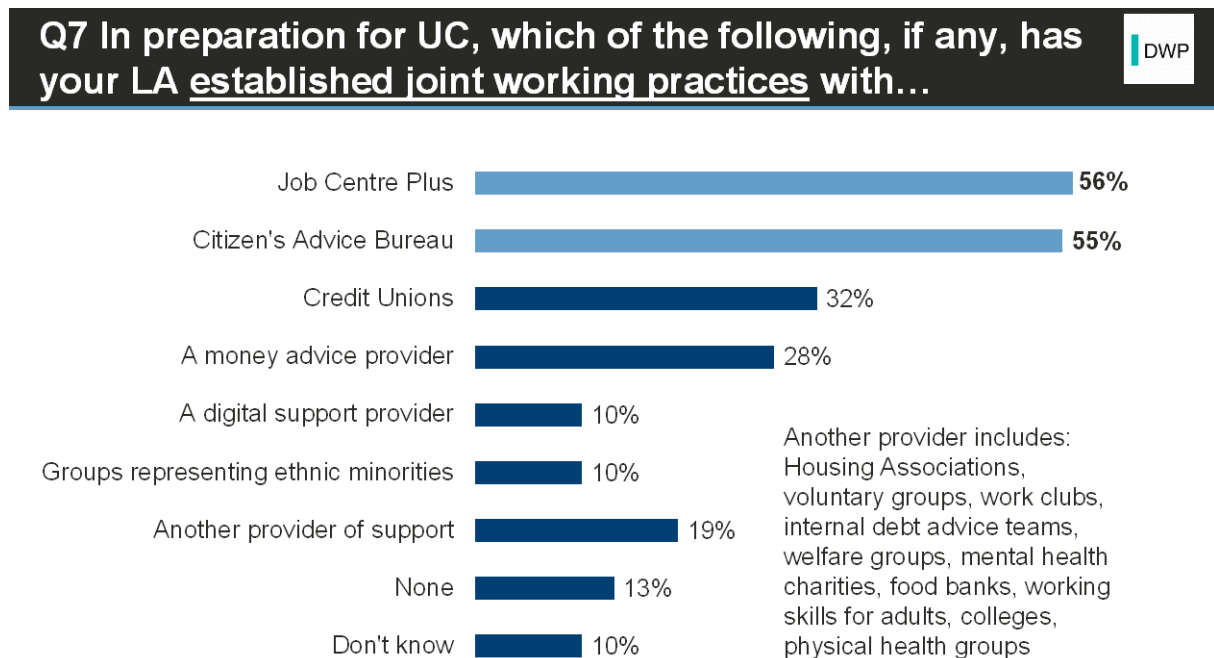
“Again, this is difficult to do until we know when UC will be implemented in our area. I am assuming that once we are advised of this there will be discussions with the DWP on how we engage in the process.”

“Is this our job? Haven’t done anything yet. Should be DWP’s job I would have thought.”

2.3 Working in partnership

Many LAs had established internal or external partnerships with three quarters (74%) of LAs saying they were working with other agencies within their LA, such as Social Services, Education and Housing. Nearly eight in ten (77%) had established joint working practices with external organisations.

Jobcentre Plus (56%) and Citizens Advice Bureau (55%) were the most frequently external organisations partnered with. It is less common for LAs to partner with digital support providers and groups representing ethnic minorities.



Base: All local authorities (145)

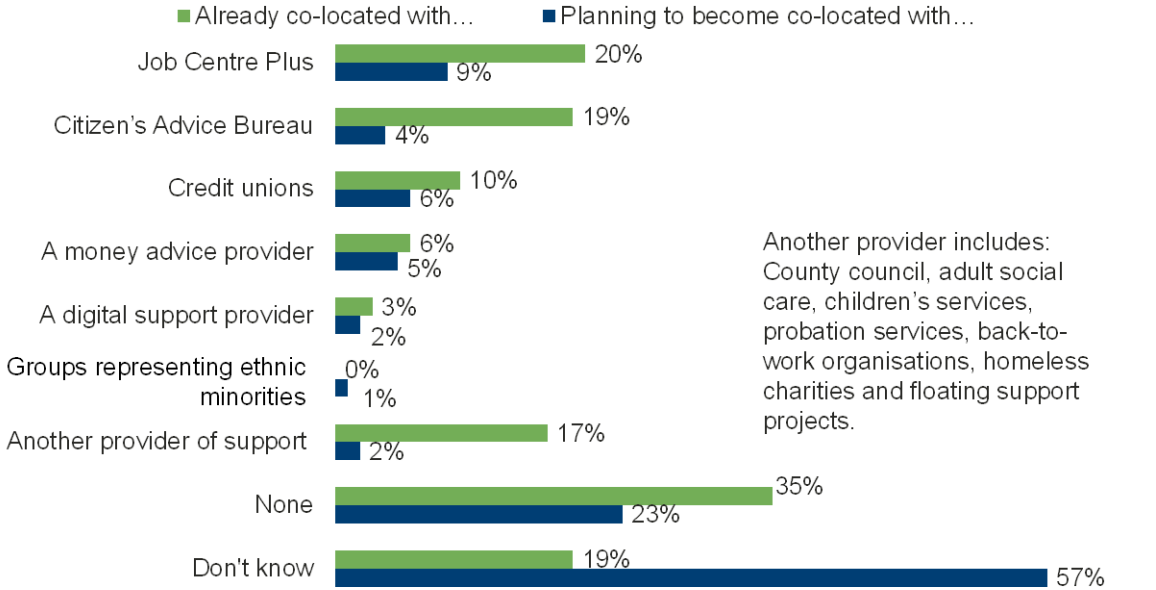
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Co-location is less widespread than formation of partnerships, with two in five authorities (46%) saying they had become co-located with another organisation. Jobcentre Plus (20%) and Citizens Advice Bureau (19%) again appear at the top of the list. A further one in five (19%) LAs said they have plans to co-locate, however over half (57%) don't know about future plans for co-location.

Q8 In preparation for UC, has your LA become co-located/ planning to become co-located with any of the following organisations? DWP



Base: All local authorities (145) Source: Ipsos MORI
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Costs of co-location are unknown to many, however those able to contribute explained that costs largely vary depending on the way in which co-location is set up. The main overheads tend to be rental of office space, staff salaries and the set-up of IT systems.

“£11.6k annual rent plus £1k set-up costs for a small satellite office, which has 2 Housing Benefit staff - to consider main office co-location would cost considerably more.”

“We have a CAB debt advisor based in our customer contact centre which has no significant costs attached to it. However incorporating a JCP advisor into one of our teams, an awful lot of time was spent in sorting out the ICT requirements.”

2.4 Successes and challenges in preparation for Universal Credit

2.4.1 Successes

LAs generally considered partnerships and joint working to have gone well. For the majority of LAs who had partnered with organisations, communications tend to run smoothly. Co-location is also viewed positively by many.

“Joint working internally within the Council. Also have a very good working relationship with the Jobcentre.”

LAs welcome the opportunities to share knowledge and learning.

“Bringing organisations together to plan collectively in partnership and share knowledge and resource.”

Several LAs had positive things to say about input from DWP, saying that training sessions were useful, as were guidance documents and regular meetings with DWP representatives.

“DWP training and attendance at landlord forum.”

2.4.2 Challenges

Some LAs who had engaged in partnership working encountered some difficulties in liaising with other organisations. Additionally, knowledge gaps around data sharing and the number of affected customers within the LA caused their own difficulties. As the move to UC is new for all LAs, many expressed a desire to learn from others, to share knowledge in order to minimise mistakes and learn best practice.

“Information we read is contradictory to what other LAs experiences have been. We really want front facing information and this seems to be missing. There is lots about the customer experience but nothing about the LAs role in this.”

Some LAs had specific cause for concern, for example, the uncertainty around the impact of the Scottish referendum.

The biggest challenge, however, was reported to be a lack of clarity about timescales and future plans from DWP. This uncertainty is said to be preventing certain decisions being made, and hindering the amount of preparation that can be done. Working on improving communications and sharing information will be key to helping LAs prepare effectively.

“Awaiting more detailed information from DWP about timescales and potentially affected residents.”

“A lot of communication, but nothing substantial as the goal posts keep changing.”

Appendix 1 - Questionnaire

DWP Local Authority Insight Survey: Universal Credit

In this wave of the DWP Local Authority (LA) Insight Survey we're focusing on Universal Credit (UC).

As you know, Universal Credit is a new single payment for people who are looking for work or on a low income. It aims to help claimants and their families to become more independent and simplify the benefits system by bringing together a range of working-age benefits into a single payment. We would like to know how Local Authorities are preparing for Universal Credit.

Your answers to this survey are completely confidential to the research team at Ipsos MORI.

Please feel free to consult colleagues when answering this survey. Please note that you can close the survey and reopen it at the most recent point should you need to do so.

PREPARING FOR UNIVERSAL CREDIT

Q1.

Has Universal Credit been implemented within your Local Authority?

Yes

No

PREPARING STAFF, SYSTEMS AND CLAIMANTS

Q2.

PLEASE SELECT ONE ANSWER

In general, which of the following statements best describes the current level of preparedness of staff and systems for the switch to UC at your LA? Please select one box only

1. In our LA, staff and systems are completely prepared for the switch to UC
2. In our LA, staff and systems are preparing for the change to UC but we are not ready yet
3. In our LA staff and systems are not yet making preparations for the switch to UC
4. Don't know

Q3

YOU MAY SELECT MULTIPLE ANSWERS

What has your LA done already, or is planning to do, to prepare staff and systems for UC? Tick all that apply in both columns.

	Q3A Already Done	Q3B Planning to do
Training courses aimed at improving general awareness	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Specific training in implementing UC	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Sent generic information	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Sent tailored guidance	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Sent software updates from software	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

supplier		
Meeting/updating voluntary groups	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Attending workshops	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Formed a working group	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Holding meetings	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Linking or aligning systems with other providers	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Providing Housing Benefit online	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other (please specify)
Nothing	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Don't know	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Q4

PLEASE SELECT ONE ANSWER FOR EACH QUESTION

Does your Local Authority currently record the numbers of claimants who:

	Yes	No	Don't know
Q4A. Have access to digital services at home	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Q4B. Can use digital services without support	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Q4C. Use Housing Benefit on-line	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Q5

YOU MAY SELECT MULTIPLE ANSWERS

What, if anything, has your LA done already, or is planning to do, to prepare claimants for UC? Please tick all that apply in both columns.

	Q5A. Already done	Q5B. Planning to do
Providing one-to-one guidance/advice on budgeting	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Providing group guidance/ advice on budgeting	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Commissioning 3 rd party providers to provide guidance/advice on budgeting	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Providing guidance/help with computer use	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Developing information on own website	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Directing claimants to Money Advice website	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Directing claimants to DWP website	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Signposting claimants to other websites for information (Please specify)
Mapping local free digital service	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Classes for claimants on UC budgeting	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Special/different help for HB claimants already in work	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Advising claimants specifically that UC payments will include housing costs and be paid direct to claimants	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Local service delivery projects	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other (Please specify)
Nothing	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Don't know	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

WORKING IN PARTNERSHIP

Q6.

PLEASE SELECT ONE ANSWER

In preparation for UC, have you worked in partnership with other agencies within your Local Authority: for example, with Social Services, Education and Housing departments?

Yes

No

Q7.

YOU MAY SELECT MULTIPLE ANSWERS

In preparation for UC, which of the following, if any, has your LA established joint working practices with...

1. Citizen's Advice Bureau
2. Jobcentre Plus
3. A money advice provider
4. A digital support provider
5. Credit unions
6. Groups representing ethnic minorities
7. Another provider of support (please give details)
8. Don't know

Q8A

PLEASE SELECT ONE ANSWER

In preparation for UC, has your LA become co-located with any of the following organisations?

1. Citizen's Advice Bureau
2. Jobcentre Plus
3. A money advice providernatasha
4. A digital support provider
5. Credit unions
6. Groups representing ethnic minorities
7. Another provider of support (please give details)
8. Don't know

Q8B

YOU MAY SELECT MULTIPLE ANSWERS

Are you planning to become co-located with any of the following organisations?

ONLY THOSE ANSWERS NOT SELECTED AT Q8A WILL BE DISPLAYED

1. Citizen's Advice Bureau
2. Jobcentre Plus
3. A money advice provider
4. A digital support provider
5. Credit unions
6. Groups representing ethnic minorities
7. Another provider of support (please give details)
8. Don't know

Q9.

ANSWER ONLY IF YOU SELECTED ANSWERS 1-7 AT Q8A OR B

Could you tell us what costs are associated with becoming co-located?

Q10.

YOU MAY SELECT MULTIPLE ANSWERS

What, if anything has your LA done/is your LA doing to prepare social housing provider landlords for the switch to UC?

1. Share generic information
2. Potential easements for Direct Payments
3. Aligning systems or claimant records
4. The social housing providers are getting all the information we have
5. Other (please specify)
6. Not doing anything
7. Don't know

Q11.

YOU MAY SELECT MULTIPLE ANSWERS

What, if anything, is your LA planning to do to prepare private landlords for the switch to UC?

Rent collection

Landlord forums

Send leaflets

Aligning systems or claimant records

Include articles in newsletters etc

Other (please specify)

Not doing anything

Don't know

Q12.

ANSWERS 5 AND 5 MAY NOT BE SELECTED IN CONJUNCTION WITH ANY OTHER ANSWER OPTIONS

Which of the following statements best describes how your LA has worked with social landlords who have moved tenants to direct payments of HB?

1. We have worked with social landlords who have moved tenants to direct payments of HB
2. We are currently working with social landlords to move tenants to direct payments of HB
3. We are planning to work with social landlords to move tenants to direct payments of HB
4. We have not worked with social landlords who have moved tenants to direct payments of HB and have no plans to do so
5. Don't know

Q13.

PLEASE ANSWER ONLY IF YOU SELECTED ANSWERS 1-3 AT Q12. IF NOT, GO TO Q14.

Please tell us what work you are doing, have done or are planning to do.

IDENTIFYING VULNERABLE CLAIMANTS

Q14.

What (if anything) has your LA done to identify vulnerable claimants (e.g. young people, people with mental health issues, people with drug and alcohol problems) who might have difficulty engaging with UC?

OTHER

Q15.

To finish, are there any other ways that your LA has prepared for Universal Credit?

Q16.

In making preparations for Universal Credit, what has worked well?

Q17.

In making preparations for Universal Credit, what has been challenging?

Thank you for your time

Appendix 2 – Responses by LA type and region

There is a good spread of respondents (those who completed the survey) by type of authority and region which mirrors that of non-responders (those who didn't complete the survey). Column totals may not equal 100%, due to rounding.

Type of authority	Completed survey		Did not complete survey	
	%	n	%	n
English District	55	80	51	121
London	12	17	7	16
Metropolitan	8	12	10	24
Scottish	6	9	10	23
Unitary	15	22	14	34
Welsh	3	5	7	17

Region	Completed survey		Did not complete survey	
	%	n	%	n
East Midlands	10	15	11	25
East of England	10	15	12	29
London	12	17	7	16
North East	3	4	3	8
North West	9	13	11	25
Scotland	6	9	10	23
South East	19	27	18	43
South West	12	18	8	19
Wales	3	5	8	18
West Midlands	8	11	8	19
Yorkshire and the Humber	8	11	4	10